

Northeast Sands

Recreational Resources and Opportunities

This summary of significant recreation resources in the Northeast Sands is substantially taken from the Northeast Sands chapter of the [Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin book](#) (WDNR 2015).

Significant Recreation Resources

The NES EL has over 375,000 acres, or 38% of all land and water, in public ownership, ranking fifth out of the 16 ELs in Wisconsin. This gives the NES an abundant land and water base for public recreation:

- Over 32,000 acres of public waters
- 231,000 acres of county lands
- 72,000 acres of federal lands
- Over 40,000 acres of DNR-managed recreational lands, including:
 - Almost 11,000 acres of State Forest
 - Over 6,300 acres of State Trails and Wild Rivers
 - Over 5,500 acres of Fishery and Wildlife Areas
 - Over 7,600 acres of State Parks and Recreation Areas
 - Over 8,800 acres of State Natural Areas
 - Almost 1,000 acres of Forest Legacy land (privately owned but open to public recreation)

The public lands in the NES EL offer a wide variety of recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, trapping, motorized and non-motorized trail activities, paddling, camping, wildlife watching and nature appreciation, and scenic viewing. Water-based pursuits are a special draw here, with the many high-quality, scenic rivers and streams. The Menominee, Peshtigo, Pike, and Pine-Popple rivers are very popular for paddling and fishing, drawing thousands of visitors each year. The Roaring Rapids section of the Peshtigo is considered to be the finest whitewater paddling opportunity in the Midwest. Fishing on the numerous high-quality trout streams that flow into the major rivers is also very popular, and the larger rivers and flowages contain quality warmwater game fisheries. The many waterfalls and rapids that exist in the northern portion of the EL add to the scenic appeal. Hunting, particularly for deer and ruffed grouse, is another major draw. Hiking, bird watching, swimming, and bicycling are other popular activities.

The number of recreational facilities such as trails and campgrounds in the NES is not as high as in other parts of the state. The NES counties have over 1,700 miles of recreational trails (motorized and non-motorized), but rank 11th out of 16 ELs in overall trail density (miles of trail per square mile of land). The density of hiking, biking, and cross-country ski trails is lower compared to the rest of the state, though the density of ATV trails is higher. Similarly, the NES ranks 12th out of the 16 ELs in both the number and the density of campgrounds (both public and privately owned).



Regional Recreation Needs

A recent [Recreation Opportunities Analysis \(ROA\)](#) for the recreation regions encompassing the NES EL – mostly Upper Lake Michigan Coastal with a small area in Northwoods – solicited public input about popular recreational activities in these regions, as well as regional recreational needs and shortages, through open house meetings and online public input forms. Using the information gathered through this effort, as well as from the results of a 2016 survey about recreation participation and needs administered to a random sample of Wisconsin residents statewide as part of the development of the 2017-2022 [Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan \(SCORP\)](#), the ROA identified recreation opportunities most needed in the Upper Lake Michigan Coastal (ULMC) and Northwoods regions and the potential role of DNR properties in helping to meet these needs.

Popular activities in the NES include both motorized (ATV riding, snowmobiling) and non-motorized (hiking, cross-country skiing, bicycling) trail activities, paddling, hunting and fishing, boating, swimming, and wildlife watching. In terms of recreation shortages and needs, additional opportunities for trail-based activities, especially hiking/walking trails, were commonly cited as needs by respondents in both regions. More camping and more public shore access to lakes and streams were also widely identified as needs.

The ROA used the information from both the SCORP survey and the ROA public input to group most-needed recreation activities into high, medium, and low categories. The table below lists activities ranked as high future recreation needs for the two recreation regions of the NES.

Upper Lake Michigan Coastal	Northwoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bicycling – bicycle touring/road biking• Bicycling – mountain/off-road biking• Bird or wildlife watching• Camping - developed• Camping - primitive• Canoeing or kayaking• Fishing – lake fishing from boat, canoe, kayak• Fishing – lake fishing from shore, pier• Fishing – river fishing from boat, canoe, kayak• Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking• Horseback riding• Motorboating – waterski/tubing/personal watercraft• Visiting a beach, beach walking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ATV/UTV riding• Bicycling – bicycle touring/road biking• Bicycling – mountain/off-road biking• Bird or wildlife watching• Camping - developed• Camping - primitive• Canoeing or kayaking• Fishing – lake fishing from boat, canoe, kayak• Fishing – stream/river fishing from shore or wading• Four-wheel vehicle driving• Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking• Hunting – big game• Off-highway motorcycle riding• Participating in nature-based education programs• Snowmobiling

Several properties in the NES EL plan may have potential to meet recreational shortages and high-ranked recreation needs, including non-motorized trail activities and additional public access to lakes and rivers for fishing and paddling. The planning process will evaluate the potential and suitability of the NES EL properties to add or expand these and other activities to help meet future recreation needs.

